

Flood woes require innovative solutions

SOMETIMES, in solving a problem, it is more a matter of how we spend what we have, rather than how much we have to spend.

For example, it certainly qualified as good news when Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said on Friday that the Government had approved an RM800mil allocation for flood mitigation projects in Kelantan under the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP).

He added that the projects included the deepening of Sungai Golok and Sungai Kelantan and the construction of embankments along the riverbanks to prevent water from overflowing during a downpour.

The work was initially meant to be completed in about three years but because land has to be acquired, the projects will now be stretched over five years.

It is a longer wait for the people living near the rivers. They have endured annual floods whenever the northeast monsoon arrives, bringing heavy rainfall that causes rivers and streams to burst their banks.

This has been going on for many years. In fact, parts of Kelantan and Terengganu are now reeling from floods. Therefore, whether it is three years down the road or five years, it is still comforting to know that the Kelantan projects are supposed to bring relief.

The thing to note is that the 11MP is not just a tabulation of allocations. The document sets out the country's development strategy for 2016 to 2020. And floods are mentioned quite a lot.

One of the 11MP's six strategic thrusts is to pursue green growth for sustainability and resilience.

Green growth is growth that is resource-efficient, clean and resilient. Malaysia's pursuit of this includes focusing on strengthening resilience against climate change and natural disasters.

The Government notes that the increased frequency and intensity of

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11th Malaysia Plan

natural disasters due to the adverse impact of climate change have affected the nation. It is important that Malaysia's development gains are not reversed by natural disasters.

"The immediate step is to make sure no one is left at risk," says the 11MP.

"Planning and preparing for natural disasters, identifying which areas and communities are at risk and providing the right tools in case such situations occur will be important in preparing a comprehensive disaster risk management framework."

Flood mitigation is among the several strategies that come under the focus area of strengthening resilience against climate change and natural disasters.

The efforts call for innovative solutions; throwing money at the problem will not cut it. That is why the Government is looking at generating investments from flood mitigation projects, long-term planning for flood mitigation, and improving flood forecasting and warning systems.

But there is a caveat. Dr Ahmad Zahidi cautioned that the Kelantan flood mitigation projects would not succeed if the state authorities failed to control logging activities, which have been identified as one of the reasons for major floods in the state.

That is a valid point. Floods are not just the product of climate and geography. The best-laid flood mitigation plans, no matter how innovative, will fall short if the human factor is not adequately addressed.